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S E C R E T

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Meeting between the Taoiseach, Dr. Garret FitzGerald, T.D.,
and John Cushnahan, Leader of the Alliance Party,
in Government Buildings, 24 April, 1986.

The Taoiseach said that Paisley and Molyneaux will be meeting the British for talks soon. However, he was not optimistic about the talks and felt they both needed a way out of their self-made dilemma. He was not quite sure what Paisley's intentions are.

John Cushnahan replied that at the DUP Conference, Paisley was trying to get back to a pre-Downing Street position. He was also trying to score points against Robinson who is leading the hot-heads at the moment. He believes the reason Paisley went to America was to give Robinson a chance to hang himself. At the Conference, it was noticeable that Robinson was lying back from Paisley. Paisley was very moderate and appeared to be looking for some sort of settlement. Maybe, he said, Paisley is sensing the mood of the people.

Taoiseach said he believed he was more afraid of his party and Robinson than the people.

Cushnahan said Robinson is dangerous but Paisley is interested in negotiation. Molyneaux and Paisley need to be preserved from their own self-destruction.

Taoiseach said that he agreed. He felt the Prime Minister handled the talks very well. He said that both Molyneaux and Paisley seemed very nervous. He wondered about two things: If Molyneaux and Paisley move, will they take their people with them and, if they do, will they succeed?

Cushnahan strongly advised that the Agreement should not be touched. If it is, it will only lead to a justification of violence and, indeed, cause more violence. He said that no concessions should be made until they got to the Conference table.

The Taoiseach said more than that there must also be a certain positive outcome before it could be considered.

Cushnahan said that other proposals such as Catherwood were not genuine moves on the Unionists' part; they were merely P.R. exercises.

The Taoiseach said there was some talk about the New Ireland charter. Rumour has it that Ardill, West and McNally showed their charter report to Paisley and Robinson and both found it acceptable. He had had two reports confirming this, but he said one has to be careful in case they originated from the same source. There are two elements in that proposal. One is about power-sharing. The second is about a new tri-partite arrangement. What is not clear is, are they accepting both issues or just one or two. A Westminster source said that Molyneaux told them that the proposal is hopeful.

Cushnahan said he met John Hume in Buswells before the affair became public and he did not know all Cushnahan knew. Apparently Alban Maginnis and Dorita Field were the only ones in the SDLP who knew what was going on. He heard it first from Westminster.

Taoiseach said John Hume heard it first from Paisley.

Cushnahan said the problem is that Molyneaux is very devious and good at P.R. exercises. He felt that being flexible he was putting it up to the SDLP. He believes that John Hume handled the problem in the wrong way. The Unionists genuinely thought he knew about it.

The Taoiseach said he could understand John Hume's predicament. The Unionists looked like they had meant to exploit the situation.

Cushnahan said he thought they were putting John Hume on as Unionists are always trying to fly kites.

The Taoiseach said that this type of publicity is very dangerous and he referred to reports in the newspapers which had no real foundation. He said this type of exercise militates against seeing the Unionists and they seemed to be playing games which could be very dangerous.

The Taoiseach said that while he wanted to see everybody he did not want his position to be distorted and would not allow himself to be exploited. He said he will hold back until he believes people are serious.

Cushnahan said that there would be nothing wrong with seeing reasonable Unionists.

Cushnahan said that West, McNally and Ardill initiated these proposals out of fear of re-partition. They are from Fermanagh and Tyrone and so have most to lose. Molyneaux on the other hand wants integration which is not on. At present the intention of the Official Unionists is to wreck the Assembly but as the Assembly is the primary source of income for the Unionist back benchers they are getting little support. He does not trust Molyneaux on devolution.

The Taoiseach said Molyneaux is in a very tricky position at present.

Cushnahan said that Molyneaux wanted to go as leader after the Westminster by-elections but was persuaded to stay. They had no other champion and no one to lead them, in fact they were all worse than Molyneaux. However, he has little or no commitment to devolution.

The Taoiseach asked would Paisley then be preferable on devolution to Molyneaux?

Cushnahan said Paisley is a Jekyll and Hyde character and to trust him would be grasping at straws.

The Taoiseach said, however, if Paisley moved he could precipitate a move in the OUP.

Cushnahan agreed saying that nobody can outflank Paisley.

Cushnahan said that the Alliance Party have taken a constructive line since the Agreement and unequivocally condemn violence and so are picking up votes in the Unionist community. They are appreciated by people who opted out of politics before now.

The Taoiseach said this was good news and he could understand why people from the Unionist community would be attracted to the Alliance party at this time.

Cushnahan said all we can do for the present is to sit tight.

Taoiseach: "and pray".

Cushnahan said he wanted to mention at this point that the Irish Government's absence of adverse comment, and indeed its replacement with positive comment is very helpful to the situation in Northern Ireland.

The Taoiseach said we have noticed that some Unionists are looking to Dublin for solutions. This he said is a big change.

Cushnahan said that Paisley and Robinson and others even now say that Dublin is more lenient than London.

Taoiseach said that they know this to be totally false. We keep very close to Britain on the Agreement and our positions are the same.

Cushnahan said it is important to state this clearly and there is a danger that it may appear that one is conceding to violence. Tom King is indicating lately that there may be more leniency on the Agreement.

Taoiseach: Tom King will not be allowed by the Prime Minister to be lenient as she has taken a very tough line on holding to the Agreement.

Cushnahan said that Nicholas Scott is a counter balance to Tom King.

Taoiseach agreed but said that Unionists hate him.

Cushnahan recognised that but said he is very forthright and the Unionists know he is a formidable Minister with a great knowledge of Northern Ireland.

The Taoiseach said the Unionists have lost some of the support they had in Westminster since the strike and the attacks on the police and those who might have had second thoughts about the Agreement are put off as well.

Cushnahan said that pro-Unionist people in Britain differ very considerably to Northern Ireland unionists and are only now beginning to see why.

Cushnahan said he recently had a frosty meeting with David Owen (SDP).

The Taoiseach said some of his recent statements had been very unhelpful.

Cushnahan said he is doing this to seek the support of the 14 Unionist MPs. However, Shirley Williams and Lord Donaldson have repudiated this. Shirley Williams and David Alton were at the Alliance conference to tell people they supported the Agreement. He felt that David Owen is a total opportunist. He said that Owen told Shirley Williams that the onus was on them to keep the links with the Unionists open. His anti-Agreement speech at Peterborough was reported in the Belfast Telegraph.

Cushnahan said that the Minister of State Birmingham's presence at their conference was greatly appreciated and his speech was received warmly by the delēgates. The Taoiseach said the RUC advised strongly against sending Government Ministers but he decided to ask the Minister of State to go as he wished to Government to be represented at the conference. He said that several other ministers such as the Minister for Education, Patrick Cooney, and the Minister for Health, Barry Desmond, wanted to go but on balance it was considered this might have been too provocative.

Cushnahan said there was no disruption at the conference and in a way he was hoping the DUP might picket outside. In all the circumstances the conference was very successful and their resolutions backing the Agreement were spelled out and so the party is now in a good position.

Cushnahan then mentioned the use of the Army on the border and he said that Eldon Griffiths (spokesman in Parliament for the British Police Federation) wanted to replace the police with the Army on the border.

The Taoiseach said he had not given any thought to that.

Cushnahan said that Griffiths was putting pressure on the Government to have this effected.

The Taoiseach said Mr. Griffiths has been very unhelpful eventhough he supported the Agreement. He recalled that he too was a police consultant but he never spoke in the Dail about police matters while in that role.

Cushnahan agreed that Griffith was not helpful but he said that it was being talked about and it probably would come up soon.

The Taoiseach said he would make enquiries and find out what the position was.

Cushnahan said he was worried about the Chief Constable Hermon. He said he has many detractors and they are all trying to replace him. He runs the police force with a great deal of discipline and some RUC officers do not like him for this, but he has done a great deal of work for the Force and he has no doubt about his integrity. He feels that it would be a major blow if he were replaced, especially at this time. The Taoiseach recognised his good qualities which he said were not unlike those of Commissioner Wren.

The Taoiseach ended the meeting by thanking John Cushnahan for coming and said it was useful to have these meetings.



Liam Canniffe
Department of Foreign Affairs.
26 April 1986.

cc: Taoiseach
Minister
Minister for Justice
Minister of State, Foreign Affairs
Secretary
Mr. Nally
Mr. Ward
Mr. Lillis
Ambassador London
A-I Section